



Heber City. USHS collections.

A "Tiny Ripple": The Growth of Heber City and the *Wasatch Wave*, 1889-1920

BY JESSIE L. EMBRY

Mrs. Embry is oral history program director at the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University. A version of this paper was read at a state-of-the-day ceremony in Heber City on January 4, 1989.

136

1

1

(David J. Bodenham, *The Democratic Experiment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 136.) John D. Fitzgerald, *More Adventures of the Great Brain* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1970), p. 98.

"[I]f by chance [you] pick up the little country newspaper . . . don't throw down the contemptible little rag with the verdict that there is nothing in it. . . . If you could . . . read the little paper as it is written, you would find all of God's beautiful, sorrowing, struggling, aspiring world in it, and what you saw would make you touch the little paper with reverent hands." To historian Daniel Boorstin the weekly news-paper was a symbol of the neighborhood community which "was slipping away" as the United States became more urbanized.¹

A story by John D. Fitzgerald in *More Adventures of the Great Brain* illustrated the value of the local paper. In the story, Fitzgerald's father ran a weekly newspaper called the *Advocate*. John's brother Tom, who was the Great Brain, wanted to help his father with the paper, but his father insisted he was too young. To demonstrate that he was mature enough, Tom borrowed his father's old press and started his own news-paper—the *Bugle*. He drafted his friends and younger brother John as reporters and explained, "The only local news my father prints is what people . . . want him to print. . . . By the time the *Advocate* comes out . . . everyone knows it. . . . I want the news that will reveal the deep secrets in this town that the public is entitled to know."²

The first edition included the solution to a bank robbery and "deep secrets" such as a particular woman being destined to die an old maid because she was too picky. When the local residents who had been attacked arrived at the *Advocate* office to protest the *Bugle*'s news, Tom's father consoled them and then told his son, "A good journalist doesn't deliberately hurt people just to sell newspapers. . . . It is true a good newspaperman seeks to expose evil when that evil is a threat to the community. . . . But when you print that Mrs. Haggerty's rugging drives her husband to drink, and all the other scandals in your local newspaper, that is an invasion of their privacy and subject to libel laws. Moreover, it performs no useful service for the community."³

¹ Miss Embry is oral history program director at the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University. A version of this paper was read at a state-of-the-day ceremony in Heber City on January 4, 1989.

² (David J. Bodenham, *The Democratic Experiment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 136.) John D. Fitzgerald, *More Adventures of the Great Brain* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1970), p. 98.

³ (ibid., pp. 102-6)

Heber City had a similar experience with a paper, the *Heber Herald* published by ten-year-old Abram Hatch, Jr., from 1890 to 1893. It was discontinued, however, not because of the type of news it carried but because the youthful editor complained of too many chores and too much homework. Hatch's source of news was often the same as the *Pugle's* though; "Ex-Editor Hatch, reminiscently recalled his boorish habit of eavesdropping among the gossiping members of the Whittling Club at the public hitching post in Heber. 'When I got both ears full I hurried back across the street and set it in type.'"¹⁴

The *Herald* was the "competition" for those three years to the *Wasatch Wave*, the weekly newspaper that is still published in the county and which started the same year, 1889, that Heber City was incorporated. The *Wave*, like the *Mount Pleasant Pyramid*, the *Richfield Reaper*, the *San Juan Record*, and many other weeklies, provides local news and timely editorials. In the centennial year of the incorporation of Heber City and of the founding of the *Wave*, it is fitting to examine the role that the *Wave* has played in Heber, which was similar to the relationship between other communities and country newspapers in Utah and the United States.

A number of studies have praised the virtues of local papers. According to one, "The position of the country weekly newspaper is that of a pulsing, throbbing institution which reaches to the grass roots of the community social structure, reflecting its life, customs, and civilization." Although probably overstating, one professor of journalism in the early 1900s even went so far as to say, "Without its newspaper the small-town American community would be like a school without a teacher or a church without a pastor."¹⁵ The newspaper, like a teacher or a preacher, played an important role in promoting development and what the community's founding fathers would call progress. Yet despite the importance of weeklies in small communities at the turn of the century, "Newspapers have become so commonplace in the everyday lives of the American people that social observers and particularly historians have overlooked them as a vital institution within American society providing an indispensable service—the delivery of information and opinion."¹⁶

¹⁴ Cecil Alter, *Early Utah Journalism* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1938), p. 84 (Pages 83-87 give a history of the *Herald* and some quotes from the newspaper.)

¹⁵ Thomas E. Bernhart, "Country Press Is an Intimate Press," *The Newspaper and Society A Book of Readings*, ed. George L. Bird and Frederic E. Merwin (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1942), pp. 335-36.

¹⁶ Perry J. Ashley, ed., *American Newspapers Journalism, 1873-1900* (Detroit: Krieger Clark, 1983), p. xi.

Around the turn of the century when the *Wave* was just getting its start, a whole set of literature about country journalism was also appearing. These books told the value of local newspapers, how to start and publish a paper, and perhaps more important to the local editor, how to write a good editorial. A 1926 study asked the editor to "understand the nature of community life" and "some glimmering of the part that he may play," concluding that "if he then develops his paper consciously toward those ends that seem to him more desirable, it is almost certain that his reward will be great."¹⁷ Another account asked local editors to avoid "wandering afar in their editorial efforts and of neglecting the home field. . . . There are community problems that need solutions, and the editor can be of assistance in solving them."¹⁸

The *Wasatch Wave*, like other weekly newspapers in Utah, accepted the role of conscience for the town as well as the reporter of local news that "people told the editor to print." In the first edition, published on March 23, 1889, William Buys, Wasatch County and Heber City attorney, as well as "notary public, city surveyor, and civil engineer," penned,

In raising the *Wasatch Wave* we realize it is but a tiny ripple upon the great ocean of journalism, but we sincerely hope and trust that it may grow and gather strength as it proceeds on its perilous journey. We are also aware that there are breakers in its course against which it may run and be dashed to pieces and the great commotion caused by the shock be scarcely perceptible upon the broad expanse of the vast literary sea.

That first edition included advertisements (with Buys listing his various businesses right under the masthead), a "History of Wasatch County" by John Crook, "Local Waves," Park City news, and an article on "How a Dog Should Be Fed." Editorials were not limited to one page; many of the articles about local events also included comments by Buys. For example, one article described plans to build a new flour mill in Heber City, and he expressed his views on the topic. Buys, like other country editors, seems to have "usually considered himself a weakling if he did not stand positively and aggressive for or against something, monitoring the thoughts and actions of the community with the dignity and severity of a Dictator."¹⁹

¹⁷ Malcolm Macdonald Willey, *The Country Newspaper. A Study of Socialization and Newspaper Content* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), p. 18.

¹⁸ James Clifford Sadey, *The Country Newspaper and Its Operation* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1930), p. 230.

¹⁹ Alter, *Early Utah Journalism*, p. 9.

From 1889 to 1920 William Buys, his nephew George Barzee, C. O. Gianville, Joseph A. Murdock, the Wasatch Real Estate and Development Company, and Charles M. Brodhead published the newspaper. Newcomers changed some editorial policies and the paper grew in length — especially carrying more national news and syndicated stories — but the local reporting remained the same.¹⁰ The masthead of the first paper announced that it would sell for \$2.50 a year, \$1.25 for six months, and \$7.50 for three months.¹¹ (Hatch's *Herald* competed by only charging "25 cents for three months, 50 cents for six months, and so on."¹²) In 1895 when Gianville and Murdock leased the paper it sold for \$1.50 a year. In their first issue they explained, "We hope by our endeavors to make the *Wave* one of the foremost among Utah's country papers to merit your full patronage and support for [the] interests we all have in the . . . Utah territory and its people in general and . . . the upbuilding of Wasatch County and the advancement of its interest and those of its inhabitants in particular."¹³

As the town booster, nearly all of the *Wave*'s editorials described ways to improve Heber City. Progress was defined as any type of forward-looking projects that would improve life in Heber and that would bring attention to the community. Especially valuable, according to the *Wave*, were civic improvements. Around the turn of the century, "Public utilities were glamorous, for they were among technology's most spectacular contributions to modern urban life; water for indoor plumbing, safe drinking, and fire fighting; gas and electricity for industrial power as well as heating, illumination, and the bright lights of the city; telephones as well as city governments promoted public utilities. As E. A. Little explained in *The Country Publisher* in 1917, for any movement "which promises to benefit the community," a "few well planned articles will give an impetus . . . The editor can plant the seed, and with the help of the progressive men who are found in all towns, can cultivate the soil and encourage the growth of civic improvements."¹⁴ "Through the editorial," a sociological study noted,



Wasatch Wave staff, 1899. Left to right, front: George Barzee, Paul Buys, William Buys' back; Ephraim McMillan, David McMillan, Joseph A. Murdock, Luanda Buys, George A. Fisher. From *How Beautiful upon the Mountains: A Centennial History of Wasatch County* by William James Morrison.

"the country editor may easily play the role of a public opinion leader for the community. Certainly countless community projects have been initiated and carried out through the efforts of the country weekly editor."¹⁵

William Buys's obituary shows that he fit this mold:

Whenever he went into a subject he went into it with all his might. No detail was too small to receive his careful consideration. He was one of the leaders in procuring the telephone, the railroad, the waterworks, the electric lights, in fact he was a leader advocate and indefatigable worker for every public improvement we have made since he took up his abode with us over thirty years ago.¹⁶

Providing waterworks to Heber is an example of how the newspaper's encouragement provided public services to Heber. An editorial

¹¹ Ibid., p. 60.

¹² *Herald*, March 23, 1895.

¹³ *Alber, Early Utah Journalism*, p. 34.

¹⁴ *Brose*, June 4, 1895.

¹⁵ Paul Mitchell, "Taking the Urban Frontier: Denver during the Progressive Era," in Douglas W. Hoover and John T. A. Kennon (eds.), *Centuries of Change* (Moab, Utah: Bill Sykes Publishing Co., 1977), vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 27-32.

¹⁶ *Wade*, December 3, 1909.

¹⁷ Charles P. Loomis and J. Allan Bergie, *Just Stories: The Stories of George Eastman* (Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 421.

in the *Wave* just a month after it started, entitled "What We Need," reported if the springs just above town were "put in pipes to Main Street [they] would convey a head of 100 feet" which would be "sufficient force to throw the water over the tallest buildings." Rather than building artesian wells, the paper argued that for the cost of a few wells the town could lay pipes and bring water to homes. Each year editorials continued to appeal for waterworks. When Midway constructed its waterworks in 1896 the *Wave* argued that Heber needed them just as much. A resident pointed out that more people, animals, and plants had made the water impure and unhealthy. Other arguments were that some wells were "no better than sewers."¹⁸ Even the *Heber Herald* carried comments about the need for waterworks. Noting that the city drinking water came from the mountains in the irrigation streams, Hatch wrote, "Tuesday we saw a dead cow being drug through the streams and ditches. It may be called alright [*sic*]. We don't know!"¹⁹

The decision finally to build waterworks in Heber was a joint effort among the *Wave*, local citizens, the LDS church, and the town council. A 1899 editorial stated, "We have a plan which we think the best, but whether the majority of the people will agree with us, of course, we do not know. We think the most feasible is that of issuing bonds. As a general proposition we do not favor bonding or indebtedness of any kind, but in this instance we think it better than any other plan." In 1902 and 1904 the LDS church's high council talked about the need for water in town and approved passing a bond to cover the cost. In 1904 a waterworks committee canvassed the town, taking fifty-dollar subscriptions for water, and a mass meeting was held on bonding issues. An election was scheduled for July 24, 1904, and the *Wave* ran editorials asking citizens to vote for the bond "and do your part toward making Heber a city second to none of its size in the nation." The bond passed 164 to 32.²⁰

One of the newspaper's favorite topics was the railroad, first the need and then the service provided by the Rio Grande Western. Just shortly after Heber was incorporated and after the *Wave*'s first issue, the *Park Record* reported plans to build a railroad up Parley's Canyon to Park City. The *Wave* editorized, "Let it be immediately completed to

¹⁸Ibid., April 20, 1889; May 15, 1896; January 22, 1897; March 27, February 26, 1908.

¹⁹After, *Early Utah Journalism*, p. 84.

²⁰Wave, September 29, 1899; High Council Minutes, Wasatch Stake, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 16, 1902; March 12, 1904; City Council Minutes, Heber City, Utah, June 14, 1904; Wave, July 15, 1904.

Heber," arguing that since Heber was on the Indian reservation border it would be an excellent shipping stop for supplies. In true booster style it added, "We have almost within the limits of the town, the finest sandstone quarries in the west and we believe the finest in the United States. . . . Had we a railroad here, this sandstone could undoubtedly become an article of considerable value." Editorials in October pointed out that the railroad through Heber would also help open mines, provide coal to Park City and Wasatch County, open up the Uinta Basin, shorten the route to central Colorado, turn the valley into a summer resort, and develop Heber as a manufacturing center. Although the "Local Waves" section announced that a survey had been finished to Heber, the railroad was not completed at that time, much to the disappointment of the residents and the newspaper.²¹

Talk of a railroad through Heber City resumed in 1896 when a Rio Grande Western employee came to Heber and talked to Abram Hatch and other businessmen about securing a right of way through the valley. Talks continued in 1899 when twenty Heber citizens met with railroad officials. They asked residents to furnish the depot ground and to raise \$2,500 to purchase the right of way. When the money was \$700 short in August, the newspaper encouraged residents to "get behind and help" since their support was expected. By September the railroad was completed.²²

The *Wave* continued to be the railroad watchdog for the community. For example, in 1903 when the Sunday run was cut, the *Wave* editorized,

When the railroad was built into the valley by the Rio Grande Western the people here contributed liberally towards purchasing the right of way . . . and the company promised, or at least led the people here to believe that they would get a reasonable respectable service. For a time the company lived up to its implied agreement and we had an excellent railroad service with two trains a day, then one train was taken off. . . . This the people submitted to without a murmur. Now the Sunday train is taken off and we get no mail from Saturday morning until Monday.

The article pointed out the next move might be semiweekly or even weekly trains and suggested, since the service was so infrequent and so unreliable because of mud slides during the spring and snow slides during the winter in Provo Canyon, the mail might as well come on the stage from Park City since sometimes it got in before the train. In Feb-

²¹Wave, March 23, October 5, 19, 26, 1889.

²²Ibid., April 17, 1896; June 2, 30; August 11, September 29, 1899.

ruary 1904 a 75-foot snow slide nine miles below Bridal Veil Falls uprooted trees 100 feet high and stopped train service indefinitely. The *Wave* asked why one train could not go to the slide, allow the passengers to hike over the snow drift, and then catch a train on the other side.²² Despite these inconveniences, according to the *Wave*, Heber City appreciated the railroad because it brought increased prosperity and a market for goods. In 1915 the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad could boast that Heber shipped 360 cars of sheep, 280 cars of hay, 40 cars of cattle, and 60 cars of sugar beets annually.²³

Although Heber City was incorporated as a town in 1889, the *Wave* continually encouraged the residents to vote to make it a third-class city. In 1897 an editorial complained, "It isn't Heber City but it should be. Heber has been a town long enough. . . . The town corporation has outlived its usefulness and should be laid on the shelf with other worn out machinery." Three years later another editorial said,

The *Wave* has several times referred to the subject of changing the town of Heber to a city, but no one seems inclined to take hold of the matter and make a move in that direction. It is, of course, nobody's business in particular but everybody's business in general, and generally in such cases no one comes to take the initiative. All, or nearly all, admit that a city organization would be much better than a town and that the change ought to be made but that does not do it.

Each article carefully spelled out the need for a petition by 100 residents and an election and also explained that a city had greater control over how it spent its money than a town, had better premises for providing police and sanitary facilities, and would not cost more than being a town. In 1901 an editorial quoted a *Salt Lake Tribune* article, supposedly by Heber resident J. W. Aird, "Heber City people who have been in the city lately are jubilant. . . . that the initial steps" had been taken to make the town a city. "They believe that it has been in swaddling clothes entirely too long." The *Wave* added, "There is no reason why Heber should not be one of the best country cities in the state and double in population within the next ten years." Residents gathered petitions and voted in favor of cityhood in November 1901.²⁴

With all of its editorials the *Wave* was determined to make Heber

the best town of its size by promoting progress. According to the

August 14, 1895, edition,

²² Ibid., November 27, 1903, February 26, 1904.

²³ Ibid., January 29, 1915.

²⁴ Ibid., September 2, 1897, August 24, 1900, September 6, 12, November 8, 1901.

Traveling men and strangers visiting the metropolis of Wasatch County pronounce it the best town of its size in the State, and better than a great many larger ones, but when she gets to be a railroad junction center with water works, electric lights, and other metropolitan improvements, all of which are in contemplation, Heber will shine as never before and give the larger cities of the State cause for envy.

But public utilities such as waterworks, new businesses such as the railroad, and promotions such as citizenship were not the only improvements necessary to make Heber the best town of its size in the nation.

The *Wave* had other requirements. On the first Statehood Day the paper reported that "the town had the appearance of the 4th of July" with music, speeches, and the firing of guns. The paper was especially proud that in addition to speeches by stake president Abram Hatch on "The Admission of Utah" and two talks on the role of women in the new state, music was provided by the Heber Brass Band, the Olson Orchestra, and local talented individuals. Two years later when the young men left to fight in the Spanish-American War, a brass band played to send them off. Because of the war, the *Wave* noted, "celebrations this year will have a deeper and more profound nature and band music will add to the spirit." The article added, "There is plenty of material in this town to make one of the best bands of its size in the state, and if this essential adjunct to all live and enterprising towns is allowed to remain defunct as it has for two years past, the citizens are wholly to blame themselves."²⁵

Another essential ingredient for a town was a baseball team. In 1895 the newspaper asked, "What is the matter with the Heber baseballists? A few years ago we had a team here that was a credit to Wasatch County and the pride of the residents of Heber. These same men . . . with practice would soon make as strong a team as ever and Heber would again be recognized throughout the territory as a baseball town not to be sneered at." In 1911 the paper pointed out, "There is nothing that will bring life and assumed prosperity to a community like advertising what it can do. Our boys have demonstrated that they can play ball and they should be encouraged in this if for no other reason than it adds life to the community." The article suggested the sport would also increase trade and give clerks a half a day off in "good pure air" and then concluded, "Look at towns where they do not have ball games during the summer months and find, if you can, any life in such

places. True there are some few people who don't like base ball but so are there some who do not care for other good games. The majority of the people do like base ball so let's have base ball."²²

Equally important was a dramatic club. In 1889 the Heber Dramatic Association performed *The Social Glass*, and the *Wave* reported the production was "done better than last winter," and added that the editors "hoped to see more of the Heber Association soon." When the Heber Stock Company presented *The Gibratard Come-in*—age—the *Wave* reported, "That the efforts of the company are appreciated and that the play was one enjoyed to the utmost, was evidenced by the two large audiences that recently witnessed it and by the oft repeated and prolonged rounds of applause." Each major character's role was praised, and then the article concluded, "The company is by far the strongest organized in local dramatic circles for a number of seasons and we hope to see it continue to give the people first class performances." The newspaper did not give only compliments, however; a month later the *Wave* reported that the performance of *Rio Grande* was poor but hoped the company would not give up. The next year a new company, the Heber Dramatic Company, put on a show. The *Wave* said since all the actors were new, the performance was good. "The audience enjoyed it and will probably patronize the company again." Companies came and went. In 1901 the John S. Lindsay company gave "the people a genuine treat in the dramatic line," but by 1905 the *Wave* was supporting the organization of a new home dramatic company.²³

Most of all the *Wasatch Wave*, like many other small country papers, was proud of the community it served and the people it represented. For the *Wave*, as for many small town papers, the bottom line in every effort was progress. Besides promoting the growth of the community and working to make Heber a better place to live, the newspaper praised Heber's growth, virtues, and increased prosperity. In 1899 an article explained,

40 years ago Provo Valley [sic] was a howling wilderness, comparatively speaking. Where today is seen beautiful fields of waving grain was then seen only a dismal growth of . . . sage. The hardy pioneers came here and began the process of reducing the wilderness of sagebrush to places fit for the habitation of man. By slow degrees the parched and barren earth was made to yield a meager return for the labor expended upon it. Almost indescribable hardships followed the

²² Ibid., June 4, 1890; March 10, 1911.

²³ Ibid., July 27, 1890; January 8, 1897; February 11, 1897; December 22, 1905.

patis of the pioneers to this valley. Many were the obstacles to be surmounted and many were the disappointments, . . . but by honest industry and patient toil the land was cleared, seed time and harvest time came and went, and the people began to thrive and others came to join the few who were here. As the seasons rolled around each one seemed better than its predecessor. The climate grew milder and was more uniform, the winters less harsh and intolerable."²⁴

Heber City, of course, has changed a lot since the early twentieth century and so has the *Wave*. Rather than simply four pages, it now stretches into two sections. Instead of \$1.50 a year, it now costs 50 cents an issue. The small cramped type has been replaced by larger columns and photographs. There is much more advertising, including classified ads. With its readers having access to other papers, television, and radio, the *Wave* does not attempt to cover national news; it is truly a local paper. But some elements have not changed. As in the past, the local newspaper reports positive things going on around town, carries editorials, encourages city improvement, and praises the community. It still has a goal to make Heber the best community of its size in the United States. An editorial on April 22, 1967, read,

We talk a great deal . . . about the importance of creating and sustaining an image. . . . An interesting problem exists that everyone knows about, and its solution might help foster an image that no one who cares about the valley could oppose. The problem is our litter and its solution could be the first step towards creating an image of Heber Valley as one of the cleanest valleys in the country. . . . There is something to be said for those who argue that the conditions of a community's landscape reflect the citizens ethics and inner character.

Especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Heber City was a typical Utah and American town, and its newspaper reflected its growth. Following the pattern of the good country newspaper, the *Wave* gave local residents a chance to see their names in print and encouraged civic improvements in the community. Heber City's growth was brought about partially because of the encouragement of the *Wave*, and the newspaper continues to survive because of the support of the local residents in Wasatch County. At the time of incorporation and for the next thirty years Heber City closely mirrored the experiences of other Utah and American communities. Even more so, Heber City and the *Wasatch Wave* exemplify that the "country town" and the "country newspaper" with all their virtues, still exist.

From Dr. Robert & Phannie
Wolberg